

Dulles' erratic boycott of the Indochina conference at Geneva rated as the most bizarre performance of his Secretaryship.

It created consternation in Paris and London and contributed anew to the growing public image of Dulles as a maledroit, insensitive cold-warrior.

Dulles' motive was painfully clear. He foresaw a capitulation to the Communists at the Geneva negotiating table. He did not want the United States visibly associated with the proceedings. It would have been too galling an epilogue to the ennobling pronouncements of the Republican party platform.

Dulles spent the first ten days at Geneva ostentatiously avoiding contact with Chou En-lai. He took a coldly detached attitude toward the British. He told American newspapermen at a background briefing that "certain things may be done here which we cannot accept." Asked what course he would follow in that case, he replied that "we just do not participate." He said he would never sign an accord ceding territory to the Communists. He asserted that his name would never be found on such a document.

Technically, he stuck to this position. But only technically. Two and a half months later, when the Franco-British-Chinese-Russian settlement awarded half of Vietnam to the Communists, Dulles declined to have any American representative sign the deal. But he nevertheless associated the United States with it, without affixing his signature. He did so by means of a unilateral American declaration issued in Geneva on the last day of the conference. It said that the United States would view with "grave concern" any renewal of Communist aggression in Indochina—that is, any violation of the very armistice accord which Dulles refused to sign. In short, Dulles finally underwrote the agreement as the best

attainable under the circumstances. But he never formally signed his name to it.

The result of his tactics in boycotting Geneva after the first ten days was to present, for the first time in the postwar era, the bleak spectacle of France and Britain, the United States' two oldest allies, negotiating virtually alone with the Soviet Union and Communist China.

Leaving first Undersecretary Bedell Smith and then only an ambassadorial representative at Geneva, Dulles dealt frenziedly behind the scenes in Washington, Paris, and London to try to stiffen the Anglo-French stand.

The main figure with whom he negotiated in Paris, shortly before the conference and during its early weeks, was Foreign Minister Georges Bidault.

As the collapse of Dienbienphu approached, Dulles told Bidault that a battle lost was not a war lost. The discouraged Bidault replied that General de Gaulle had said the same thing in 1940, but that it was something one says in the first year of a war, not in the eighth, as in Indochina.

Bidault's recollection of the talks, as recounted to these reporters, introduces into the Dulles record a new element which, at present, reposes solely on the French statesman's testimony. Bidault understood Dulles, on two separate occasions, to have offered him the use of American atomic bombs by French forces in the Indochina war.

By Bidault's account, both offers were made before the fall of Dienbienphu; prior, that is, to the Geneva Conference. According to Bidault, both offers were made to him personally by Dulles in Paris.

The first is recalled by Bidault as an offer of one or more atomic bombs to be dropped on Communist Chinese territory near the Indochina border in a countermove against the Chinese supply lines to the Vietminh Communists.

DUEL AT THE BRINK
BY COBLIENTZ AND DRUMMOND

The second is recalled as an offer of two atomic bombs against the Vietminh forces at Dienbienphu.

Bidault, by his account, declined both offers. He told Dulles that it would be impossible to predict where the use of nuclear weapons against Red China would end, that it could lead to Russian intervention and a world-wide holocaust. In the case of the second offer, he considered the French and Vietminh forces to be by then too closely engaged at Dienbienphu to permit the use of atomic weapons.

There is no doubt in Bidault's mind that these offers were made to him by Dulles.

Bidault, in turn, asked Dulles for "something much less grave"—that is, a non-atomic air strike at Dienbienphu by American carrier planes off the Indochinese coast. This request was, however, to come to nought.

Two months later, after Mendes-France had come to power in Paris on a promise to end the Indochina war in twenty days, Dulles was still boycotting the Geneva Conference.

With all thought of American intervention abandoned, Dulles and Eden agreed in Washington on what they considered to be the minimum Western conditions for a negotiated settlement with the Communists at Geneva.

Eden, who had been taking active part in the Geneva talks, thought it would be possible to obtain these agreed minimum conditions from Chou En-lai and Molotov. Dulles thought it would not. He was convinced that Mendes-France was prepared to settle on far more disastrous terms.

When he arrived in Paris two weeks later for his first meeting with Mendes-France, a remarkable incident took place, hitherto unreported.

The two men and Eden gathered around a map after dinner at the Matignon. Dulles and Mendes-France were not talking the same language. Dulles was so persuaded that

French capitulation was imminent that he could not grasp the meaning of Mendes-France's explanations.

The French leader pointed to the partition line that he would demand at Geneva. It was the eighteenth parallel, actually further north than the seventeenth parallel regarded by Dulles as the best which could possibly be hoped for. The Communists had been demanding the thirteenth or fourteenth parallel further south.

Dulles was incomprehending. He thought Mendes-France was looking at the map upside down. Dulles took the map and turned it around.

"You mean in this direction!" Dulles said.

Mendes-France then righted the map and explained the exact situation. Dulles' demeanor was transformed. After another half hour of conversation, he told Mendes-France that the "abscess" of his suspicions had been pierced. Shortly afterwards, he said of Mendes-France to newspapermen waiting outside: "The guy is terrific."

Mendes-France then urged Dulles to end his boycott of the Indochina conference and to accompany him to Geneva for the final stage of the negotiations. He said Dulles' presence and support on the spot might be of crucial importance.

Dulles met the request part way. The next day he ordered the highly regarded Bedell Smith to return to Geneva. He never went back himself.

The powerful military arguments which helped to frustrate Dulles' desire for American intervention in Indochina raised the issue of the effectiveness of the doctrine of massive retaliation.

In short, Indochina had revealed the shortcomings of a defense posture which relied overwhelmingly on nuclear weapons. Dulles was too intelligent to miss the point. It was